

THE PICTURE OF DORIAN
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the room in the shape of a servant to tell the Duchess that her carnage was waiting. She wrung her hands in mock despair. "How annoying!" she cried. "I must go. I have to call for my husband at the club, to take him to some absurd meeting at Willis's Rooms, where he is going to be in the chair. If I am late, he is sure to be furious, and I couldn't have a scene in this bonnet. It is far too fragile. A harsh word would ruin it. No, I must go, dear Agatha. Good-bye, Lord Henry, you are quite delightful, and dreadfully demoralizing. I am sure I don't know what to say about your views. You must come and dine with us some night. Tuesday? Are you disengaged Tuesday?" "Tuesday?" "For you I would throw over anybody, Duchess," said Lord Henry, with a bow. "Glad to hear of it." "Ah! that is very nice, and very wrong of you," she cried; "so mind you come"; and she swept out of the room, followed by Lady Agatha and the other ladies. When Lord Henry had sat down again, Mr. Erskine moved round, and taking a chair close to him, placed his hand upon his arm. "You talk books away," he said; "why don't you write one?" "I am too fond of reading books to care to write them," Mr. Erskine said. "I should like to write a novel; that would be as lovely as a Persian miniature, as unreal. But there is no literary public in *Hajfflaff* for an evening except papers, primers, and encyclopaedias. In the world the English have the least sense if they judge of literature." "I fear you are right," Mr. Erskine said. "I have used to have literary ambitions, but now, my dear young man, I have long ago allowed me to call you so, may I ask if you really meant all that you said to us at lunch?" "I quite forget what I said," smiled Lord Henry. "Was it all very bad?" "Very bad indeed. In fact I consider you extremely dangerous, and if anything happens to our good Duchess we shall all look on you as being primarily responsible. But I should like to talk to you about life. The generation into which I was born was tedious. Some day, when you are tired of London, come down to Treadley, and expound to me your philosophy of pleasure over some admirable Burgundy. I am fortunate enough to possess."